



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

News Release

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ICE investigation leads to the conviction of a Dominican drug smuggler

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico—U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announced that a 39-year-old woman from the Dominican Republic was convicted Tuesday in the U.S. District Court for the District of Puerto Rico for attempting to smuggle 4.22 kilograms of heroin in violation of Title 21, United States Code, Sections 841(a)(1) and 952 (a).

Justina Jacqueline Ayala-Tapia was arrested by ICE special agents on Feb. 1, 2006 after her suspicious and erratic body language prompted U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) inspectors to refer her to a secondary inspection following her arrival at the Mayaguez port of entry from Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic.

The examination of Ayala-Tapia's luggage by inspectors and K-9 units revealed four hidden packages wrapped in plastic with several layers of carbon paper and a petrolatum substance that tested positive to heroin during a required field test.

"This conviction should send a clear message that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) components remain vigilant and united in the war on drugs," said Lydia St. John-Mellado, acting special agent-in-charge of ICE investigations in Puerto Rico. "Those who think that they can smuggle their contraband through our ports of entry need to think twice."

Ayala-Tapia is in federal custody at the Metropolitan Detention Center in Guaynabo, Puerto Rico. Her sentencing is scheduled for Aug. 8, 2006.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.